

# Australian National Council on Drugs

## 2004 - 2007 Work Plan

### **Background:**

The development of a three (3) year Work Plan is required under the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) Terms of Reference, and will be used to ensure the work of the ANCD occurs within a planned, strategic framework that also provides a mechanism for accountability.

It is also envisaged that a progress report on the implementation of this 2004-2007 ANCD Work Plan will meet the ANCD Terms of Reference requirement to report annually to the Prime Minister and the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS).

Building on the successes of previous work that has been undertaken by the ANCD, the 2004-2007 ANCD Work Plan aims to support the Australian Government's 2004-2009 National Drug Strategy and provide a solid framework outlining ANCD priorities over the coming three (3) years. It will also provide a pathway that will enable the ANCD to meet its Terms of Reference over the next three years.

*It should be noted that within the 2004-2007 ANCD Work Plan, the word "drug" refers to all drugs, including tobacco and alcohol.*

## Terms of Reference:

The ANCD Terms of Reference for 2004-2007 are as follows:

- a. Provide independent advice to the Prime Minister, Australian Government Ministers and Ministers in the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) on national drug strategies, policies, programmes and emerging issues.
- b. Contribute to the effectiveness of Australia's supply, demand and harm reduction initiatives, consistent with the national interest.
- c. Provide independent and strategic advice on drug policy and services to the Australian Government and other bodies and parliamentary parties, as appropriate.
- d. Consult and liaise with the drug and alcohol and related sector, and in particular the non-government sector.
- e. Inform and educate public knowledge and discussion on drug related issues.
- f. Build and maintain partnerships across the range of sectors concerned in dealing with and addressing drug related issues.
- g. Work closely with the MCDS, Inter-governmental Committee on Drugs and other National Drug Strategy Framework partners to develop and implement effective strategies, policies and programmes to reduce the uptake and misuse of illicit and licit drugs.
- h. Maintain effective liaison with other stakeholders, public health advisory bodies and relevant peak non-government organisations, including consumer representatives.
- i. Develop a three year Work Plan for the Council.
- j. Report annually to the Prime Minister and the MCDS on the work of the Council.

## **Introduction:**

The Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) was established by the Prime Minister in 1998 as a part of the Australian Government's response to reduce the uptake and use of drugs and the harm it causes in our community. Today, an important component of the ANCD's work is to ensure that policies, strategies and directions in the drug and alcohol field are consistent with the National Drug Strategy 2004-2009.

The National Drug Strategy 2004-2009, which builds on the experience and achievements of the National Drug Strategic Framework 1998-99 to 2003-04, provides a framework for a coordinated, integrated approach to drug issues in the Australian community. It clearly states that the framework's effectiveness depends on the support and integration of strategies on national, state and territory levels across government and non-government sectors and a high level of cooperation between a very broad range of sectors.

The ANCD works to facilitate this approach by virtue of its unique role in enhancing the partnership between government and the community. It has pivotal advisory, advocacy and representative functions, with a significant role to provide government Ministers with independent, expert advice on matters related to licit and illicit drugs. The ANCD brings to the national effort expertise from volunteer and community organisations, rehabilitation, law enforcement, research, education, health and social welfare fields. The cooperation of these fields is vital to the comprehensiveness of Australia's policy response to alcohol and other drug issues in our community. The ANCD will continue to strive to work in an honest and transparent manner in the provision of independent, evidence based advice to government on a range of alcohol and other drug (AOD) matters.

The ANCD seeks to achieve its goals through a wide range of activities including: commissioning a wide range projects; contributing to public debate on a range of drug related issues; conducting community consultation and supporting initiatives to strengthen the AOD sector.

## **ANCD Activities:**

### **ANCD Projects**

ANCD projects are commissioned following consideration of the ANCD's role and work plan priorities, consultations with the alcohol and other drugs (AOD) sector, and consideration of where the AOD sector and/or the ANCD require further information in order to provide credible advice to Government. The ANCD ensures that its research projects provide a current and evidence based approach to AOD issues and are widely disseminated. Projects that were released in the duration of the 2001-2004 ANCD Work plan include the following:

- Structural Determinants of Youth Drug Use (2001)
- Evidence Supporting Treatment (2001)
- Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Projects 1999-2000 (2002)
- Drug Policy: the Australian Approach (2002)
- Heroin Related Overdoses- Position Paper(2002)
- High Risk Groups and Behaviours- Position Paper (2002)
- A Secondary Position Paper on Heroin Related Overdoses- Position Paper (2002)
- Naloxone Availability- Position Paper (2002)
- Needle and Syringe Programs- Position Paper (2002)
- Rural and Regional Projects- Workshops and Consultation Forum Papers (2002)
- National Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Workshop (2002)
- Cape York Indigenous Issues (2002)
- Diversion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth From Juvenile Detention (2003)
- Dealing with Risk: A Multidisciplinary Study of Injecting Drug Use, Hepatitis C and Other Blood-Borne Viruses in Australia (2003)
- Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Projects: Elements of Best Practice (2004)
- Supply, Demand and Harm Reduction Strategies in Australian Prisons: Implementation, Cost and Evaluation (2004)

Current initiatives of the ANCD in progress include the following:

- Media initiative
- Mapping national drug treatment capacity
- Evidenced-based answers to cannabis questions
- Young people and drugs
- Positive stories web site
- AOD Charter
- Family projects

### **Contribution to public debate**

The ANCD contributes to public debate around alcohol and other drug related issues in the following ways:

- Production of a national AOD magazine, *Of Substance*, an independent publication that targets AOD frontline workers and aims to bridge the gap between AOD research and professional practice in the sector;
- Maintaining a working relationship with journalists and other media representatives; and,
- Regularly issuing media releases around various topics.

### **Community consultation**

The ANCD regularly holds forums that provide members of the AOD and related sectors a mechanism by which to raise any concerns with the ANCD. It also allows the ANCD an opportunity to inform the sector on current initiatives and information on drug issues.

### **Supporting initiatives to strengthen the AOD sector**

The ANCD strives towards strengthening the AOD sector and to build capacity within the sector to facilitate best practice. The ANCD has a number of ongoing initiatives that work towards this end. These include collaborative work on the National Drug and Alcohol Awards, commissioning of the annual Rural and Regional Study Grants and recent project work around creating a National AOD Charter.

The ANCD recognises the dynamic environment surrounding drug issues, and thus aims to ensure that the Work Plan for the coming three years is both relevant to the National Drug Strategy while maintaining a reasonable level of flexibility.

### **Relationship to the 2004-09 National Drug Strategy:**

The ANCD is committed to making a meaningful contribution to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the 2004-09 National Drug Strategy. This is achieved by:

1. Ensuring that the views and aspirations of the non-government sector, families, specific communities and the general community are heard and articulated to governments;
2. Commissioning a range of research and work projects to better inform policy and service delivery;
3. Communicating identified and emerging trends and issues in drug use;
4. Working closely with the structures, institutions, groups and individuals responsible for the planning, implementation and evaluation of Australia's national drug policies, strategies and frameworks.

## **ANCD Principles:**

The following list represents a set of principles that will underpin the ANCD attempts to address the priority areas set by the 2004-2007 ANCD Work Plan:

1. Development of drug policy and strategies that are based on evidence.
2. Encouragement of collaboration within the community to reduce the uptake of drug use and drug related harm.
3. Provision of a long-term outlook that provides effective and sustainable responses to issues likely to affect future generations.
4. Facilitation of resources to engage local communities and service providers in developing and implementing locally relevant activities.
5. Encouragement for new ideas and innovative approaches to be generated in the wider communities.
6. Encouragement of an equitable approach to drug policy development and service provision that considers the needs of all groups within our communities, particularly those that are disadvantaged.
7. Providing continuing support for Australia's national approach to drugs, which is based on principles of harm minimisation and works to promote partnerships and co-operation between all levels of government with the non government sector, particularly in health, justice and education.
8. Contributing to the breadth and depth of understanding of drug issues and problems in Australia by defining and documenting contemporary needs and emerging issues.

9. Promoting a greater understanding on the nature and extent of drug issues across Australia including between different communities and population groups.
10. Promoting a balanced viewpoint in the community around issues affecting drug users, their families and friends, and around issues that may involve community concerns regarding safety and amenity.
11. Increasing the focus on effective and evidence based preventive strategies, policies and programs, particularly those targeting Indigenous communities, families and young people.
12. Ensuring the ANCD responsibly uses its position and relationship at the national level to influence the full spectrum of government activity and enterprise aimed at minimising the harm caused by drugs in Australia and internationally.
13. Maintaining a focus on areas that may be problematic for governments to address while working to make a positive contribution to such areas.

## **ANCD Priority areas:**

Based on a review of Australia's national target areas and the ANCD Terms of Reference, the ANCD has sought to identify a select number of key issues, or "priority areas", which will be the focus of the majority of the Council's efforts over the course of the 2004-2007 Work Plan. Whilst the ANCD intends to focus on these priority areas through its activities during the course of the current work plan, the ANCD also recognises that the changing nature of drug use in our society today demands a flexible approach. Accordingly, the priority areas listed are not intended to cover all issues of significance. Rather, they represent a set of areas around which the Council believes it both should and has the capacity to make a positive contribution within the scope of its activities for 2004-2007.

ANCD priority areas for 2004-2007:

- 1. Emerging issues**
- 2. Vulnerable groups**
- 3. High risk environments**
- 4. Addressing social inequities**
- 5. Capacity building**

(please note that these are not listed in order of importance)

# 1. Emerging Issues

The ANCD acknowledges the dynamic and evolving nature of the AOD field and recognises that changes in patterns of drug use and other related issues warrant timely responses from policy and decision makers. The ANCD aims to continue its efforts to ensure that it receives timely evidence based information about current and emerging drug trends, and to communicate with all relevant institutions, groups and individuals on identified and emerging trends and issues in drug use. Where possible, the ANCD will consider involvement in responding to emerging issues through research and/or other initiatives and, where this is not possible, aims to support national efforts to do so.

Some of the areas identified by the ANCD at this stage include the gathering of accurate and current information on cannabis and its relationship with mental health disorders, the increasing production and use of methamphetamine, the need for an increased awareness of the harms associated with alcohol use, the need for more treatment options, the growing levels of drug use and HIV rates within our Region, and dealing with the emergence of a variety of designer and club drugs being used by young people in particular.

## 2. Vulnerable Groups

The ANCD recognises that there are a number of population groups who, for a variety of reasons, experience disproportionate levels of drug related harm or who are especially at risk of experiencing the harms that may be associated with problematic drug use. The ANCD has sought to identify three major “at risk” population groups that will be targeted within the 2004-2007 Work Plan. This list is not intended to encompass all “at risk” groups in the community. Rather, the following list represents groups that will be targeted within the scope of the Council’s activities:

1. Indigenous communities
2. Families
3. Young people

### **Indigenous Communities**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to experience disability and reduced quality of life due to ill health and have a lower life expectancy than other Australians. The use of licit drugs such as tobacco and alcohol poses a disproportionate health risk to Indigenous communities as compared to the total Australian population. In particular, the social impact of the use of alcohol is a serious concern. Issues facing Indigenous communities also include the harms associated with petrol sniffing, the use of inhalants, the use of kava, high rates of cannabis use and increasing amphetamine and other illicit drug use. It remains a priority of the ANCD to support national efforts that address drug related harm and associated issues affecting Indigenous people and, in particular, the ANCD supports the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Complementary Action Plan 2003-2006.

### **Families**

Research indicates that the family represents the single most important risk and protective factor for drug abuse. Of particular significance is the quality of parent/child relationship. Drug use in the family context is also known to have a huge impact on the economic, physical and social wellbeing of the individual and the problems stemming from drug use within a family context are numerous and complex. The ANCD acknowledges the significant hardships that are faced by families with a member or members who

have drug problems, and recognises the importance of providing families of drug using members with support, education and assistance. The ANCD is committed to making a positive contribution to national efforts to address some of the issues around problematic drug use within the family context.

## **Young People**

Among young people, a number of significant trends in the use of licit and illicit drugs are cause for concern. Among these, the use of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and the increasing use of amphetamines and other designer and club drugs are all significant. The ANCD recognises that young people represent an important group in terms of prevention and early intervention, given the greater capacity to avoid later social, health and economic consequences of drug use. The ability to work with young people both in the school environment and the community is an essential component of any plan attempting to address issues for young people. Accordingly, the ANCD aims to strengthen our knowledge on issues affecting young people and to support national efforts to target young people in research and practice at the school and in the community.

### **3. High risk environments**

The ANCD acknowledges that there are several settings that may provide an environment in which individuals are more likely to experience drug related harm. Given the scope of the ANCD's activities, the Council aims to have a positive impact on improving knowledge and practice around the problematic drug use and related issues that occurs in two settings: prisons and rural and remote regions of Australia. The ANCD acknowledges the wide range of issues that exist around problematic drug use in these settings and, in accordance with national efforts, aims to make a positive contribution to addressing these issues.

The following provides background information around problematic drug use in these two settings.

#### **Prisons**

Research indicates that around 50% of inmates in Australian custodial settings have a history of injecting drug use. A significant proportion of inmates (around 25%) continue to inject while in custody. Furthermore, some research indicates that around 10% of inmates are initiated into drug-injecting practices whilst in custodial settings. In the absence of many harm reduction measures, this group reports extremely high rates of sharing injecting equipment (about 90%) and consequently, high rates of hepatitis C and proportionally higher rates of HIV in comparison to the general community. There are also significantly higher rates of historical and current drug and alcohol use amongst prisoners. This further highlights the need to provide drug education, treatment and care options equivalent to those in the community.

#### **Rural and Remote Areas**

Rural and remote settings are high risk environments for drug related harm for a variety of complex reasons. Factors such as isolation, boredom and stress that may be particular to rural and remote areas are often associated with problematic drug use in these settings. There are also many issues that face people living in rural and remote areas who have alcohol and other drug problems. These include the need to travel long distances to receive services, the lack of access and availability of general health services in many communities, a lack of confidentiality in small communities, few residential or specialist programs and less access to information and education. The relationship between alcohol and transport injuries in rural and remote areas, particularly in young men, is also of concern.

## 4. Addressing social inequities

There are a number of population groups who, for a variety of reasons, are more likely to experience social and economic disadvantage. As a result of this, such groups also experience disproportionate levels of drug related harm. The ANCD recognises that social inequity is a major determinant of problematic drug use and that significant structural reform is necessary to address the inequities that create and perpetuate underlying factors associated with harmful drug use in society. The ANCD supports governmental responses to this issue and, within its capacity, seeks to address these issues through quality, evidence-based research that aims to increase public awareness of factors underlying harmful drug use.

In particular, the ANCD will work to achieve structural reform through enhancing relationships within and between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, peak bodies, non government organisations and other advisory bodies. The ANCD also acknowledges the strength of local approaches to localised problems. Accordingly, the ANCD recognises that, in keeping with the increasing role for the non-government and community sector in drug policy and program approaches in Australia, there is a need to provide adequate support to these groups, including financial support, and where possible appropriate access to decision making forums.

A critical area in this structural reform response will be increasing the understanding and possible adoption of drug and related impact statements on legislative, regulative and policy changes across a wide variety of government portfolios.

## **5. Capacity building**

The ANCD acknowledges the value of initiatives that build capacity within the community to effectively respond to AOD and related issues. In particular, the ANCD aims to encourage and support six major aspects of capacity building:

### **Intersectoral partnerships**

The ANCD supports the strengthening of partnerships between and across government, non government, private sectors and the community. This is particularly relevant across the education and training sector, law enforcement, workplace relations, health care service providers, commercial industry (especially tobacco and liquor industries), and policy and decision makers in government. In regard to law enforcement the ANCD recognises the value of a partnership approach to programs such as the Illicit Drug Diversion initiative.

### **Communities**

The ANCD supports and encourages community involvement in decision making processes and recognises the value of strengthening local approaches to local problems through achieving an ongoing partnership between the community and relevant sectors such as health and law enforcement. This ensures that programs and initiatives are responsive to local community needs.

### **Workforce development**

The ANCD also believes in working towards building a strong, stable and skilled workforce in the drug and alcohol sector (and other related sectors) and addressing the barriers that hinder positive change in this area. The ANCD understands that increasing access to quality education and treatment for drug users and their families is dependent on achieving improved workforce qualities in the AOD sector. Increasing the knowledge and skill amongst the personnel in related sectors is also critical in improving the quality of outcomes for the community from drug policies and programs.

### **Information sharing**

The ANCD encourages the wide dissemination of both evidence based research findings that are relevant to the AOD sector and of evaluated best practice techniques in prevention and treatment interventions that minimise the harms associated with drug use.

### **Evaluation processes and review mechanisms**

The ANCD supports the detailed evaluation of processes, impacts and outcomes of initiatives under the 2004-09 National Drug Strategy and related policies and programs implemented across all jurisdictions.

### **Leadership**

The ANCD promotes leadership and best practice in the AOD sector and aims to acknowledge and support individuals and organisations within the AOD sector that espouse and practice these qualities

### **Funding and resource allocation**

The ANCD aims to support the allocation of funding and resources into appropriate areas in accordance with the priorities set by the 2004-09 National Drug Strategy and in areas of emerging need.